

## **A Pragmatic Diplomacy: Italian-Soviet Relations in the Early 1960s**

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**Abstract.** Despite often being part of different alliances, in developing their diplomatic relations Russia and Italy have traditionally adopted a pragmatic approach. This contribution aims to cast light on a particular moment of Italian-Soviet relations, in which the two countries showed diplomatic skills and political willingness to overcome their difficulties in the context of the Cold War.

**Keywords:** Italian-Soviet relations, détente, Cold War, Neo-Atlanticism, ENI, Fanfani

## **Прагматичная дипломатия: итало-советские отношения в начале 1960-х годов**

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**Аннотация.** Италия и Россия часто вступали в разные альянсы в истории. Несмотря на это, они придерживались прагматического подхода в развитии их дипломатических отношений. В работе рассматривается пример политического сближения, имевшего место между Италией и СССР в контексте холодной войны.

**Ключевые слова:** итало-советские отношения, разрядка, холодная война, неоатлантизм, ENI, Фанфани

After WW2, Italy pursued its national interests by grounding its foreign policy in the Atlantic Alliance and the European integration process. In the late-1950s, though, Italian ruling class slightly adjusted this strategy in order to gain a more influential position in dealing with international

and Euro-Atlantic affairs. The “neo-atlanticist” agenda consisted in interpreting the keystones of Italian foreign policy (Europeanist, Atlanticist, Mediterranean) in a more dynamic way, i.e., fostering broader political and economic relations with the Arab countries and the USSR and its Eastern European allies. In particular, Italian officials thought the country should carve out its own role in the still tentative détente process, committing itself to “build bridges” between the West and the East as well as the North and the South of the world.

At the time, Soviet-Italian relations were experiencing difficulties. Italian authorities feared USSR’s interferences in Italy’s domestic politics through its ties with the Italian Communist Party. There were also pending issues that dated back to wartime, such as the payment of war reparations claimed by the USSR and the fate of Italian prisoners of war in Soviet territories. Moreover, the Kremlin had been protesting the Italian government’s decision to host Jupiter ballistic missile launch sites in Italy as part of the US-NATO security policy.

Despite these complications, in the early 1960s Italy and USSR relaunched their relations to some extent. At the core of the Soviet-Italian rapprochement lay a combining of economic and political interests. Part of Italian politicians and diplomats believed that by normalising its relations with Moscow Italy would gain international leverage, possibly obtaining an invitation to take part in the discussions on European security issues at great powers’ level. To achieve this goal, the government resorted to economic channels, since “good business makes good friends”, as ambassador Pietromarchi put it [1, p. 75]. On 8–11 February 1960, the president of the Italian Republic Gronchi and the foreign minister Pella went on an official visit to Moscow. While the talks on the nuclear and conventional disarmament and the German question were not successful, the two countries signed a cultural bilateral agreement and recognised a mutual interest in increasing their commercial exchange. On October 1960, Mattei’s ENI reached a historic agreement with Sojuzneftexport, which had a significant impact on Italian foreign policy, raising concerns among NATO and EEC countries on the solidity of Italy’s anchorage to the Western bloc.

As the government led by Fanfani assured, Italy had no intention to switch sides. If anything, Fanfani promoted the dialogue with Moscow so

that Italy could play a major role within the Western bloc in the détente process. The litmus test of Italian foreign policy toward the USSR occurred in the wake of the second Berlin crisis. On 2–5 August 1961, Fanfani and foreign minister Segni flew to the USSR to meet Khrushchev, to whom they pointed out the necessity to avoid unilateral solutions and to resume negotiations. Once back from Moscow, Fanfani informed US and NATO countries that the USSR was waiting for an indication of their willingness to find a compromise to end the crisis. As is known, Fanfani's mission failed and, on August 13, the Berlin Wall was erected. Nevertheless, Italy's stance on the value of multilateral negotiation as the most effective way to secure international peace did not change.

### **References**

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